

Mahorney-O'Brien House  
3522 P Street, N.W.  
(Georgetown)  
Washington  
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-198

HABS,  
DC,  
GEO,  
134-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

~~MAHORNEY-ALBRIEN HOUSE~~

Location: 3522 P Street, N.W. (Georgetown), Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: Stanhope Chase (1969)

Present Occupants: Rental tenants (1969)

Present Use: Residence (1969)

Significance: This is a good example of the type of frame house often built as rental property in early nineteenth century Georgetown.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: ca 1821-1832. Lot 105 was assessed at \$400 and listed as vacant. In 1821 George Mahorney bought Lot 104 and 105 for \$500, the low price indicating that the land was still vacant. It is likely that Mahorney, a brick-layer, built four houses, (85, 83, 81 and 79 Third Street) on Lot 105 soon after purchasing the property, and living in one of them, used the others as rental property. In the Washington City Directory of 1830, Mahorney is listed as living at the corner of Third (now P) and Ligan (now 36th) Streets (number 85 Third Street). On January 26, 1833, the Georgetown Metropolitan advertised for sale at public auction Lot 105, 134 and the north part of 104 with the improvements "consisting of several (four) excellent two story dwelling houses (one brick, the others frame)....". The present 3522 P street was presumably one of the three frame houses.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The building is located in Square 1247, Lot 817 in the City of Washington (formerly Square 77, Lot 105 in Threlkeld's Addition to Georgetown). Its original address was 79 Third Street. The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the office of the Recorder of Deeds, Washington, D.C.

- 1821 John Treilkeld to George Mahorney  
Deed September 27, 1821 Recorded October 9, 1821  
Liber W.B. 2, folio 255
- 1834 Clement Cox trustee of George Mahorney to Alfred  
Boucher  
Deed July 2, 1834, Recorded July 2, 1834  
Liber W.B. 51, folio 16
- 1843 Alfred H. Boutcher et ux Sarah to William T. Herron  
Deed May 26, 1843 Recorded August 15, 1843  
Liber W.B. 103, folio 151
- 1851 William T. Herron et ux Henrietta V. to John  
O'Donoghue  
Deed October 13, 1851 Recorded October 15, 1851  
Liber JAS 31 folio 331
- 1859 John O'Donnoghue et ux Jane to John Brien (also known  
as O' Brien)  
Deed October 7, 1859 Recorded September 7, 1860  
Liber JAS 196, folio 429
- 1888 John O' Brien died April 14, 1888, intestate,  
survived by his widow, Johanna O'Brien, and four  
children--James and John O'Brien, Ellen O'Brien  
Sullivan, and Mary O'Brien Sullivan.  
Johanna O'Brien died July 30, 1908, intestate.
- 1943 Phillip F. Biggins William R. Simpson, Jr. trustees  
under Degree in Civil Action #10584 (Mary Sullivan  
vs. other heirs of John and Johanna O'Brien) to  
Roxanna B. Doran  
Deed February 18, 1943, Recorded March 22, 1943  
Liber 7842, folio 175
- 1948 Roxanna B. Doran to Stanhope Chase  
Deed November 5, 1948 Recorded November 5, 1948  
Liber 8862, folio 429

3. Alterations and additions: P street was regraded in 1895 to provide tracks for a trolley line. This change placed the first floor of this house below street leve. The front appears to have been resurfaced at sometime, and the cornice is a mid-nineteenth century replacement. Interior doors are replacements. Modern plumbing and heating have been installed.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

In the decade between 1820 and 1830 George Mahorney made numerous real estate purchases in Georgetown and Washington. At the same time, with Joseph Brigden as business partner, he operated a storehouse and grocery business in Washington. Another of his ventures was operating a tavern at the corner of Third and High Streets (now P and Wisconsin Avenue) in Georgetown.

By the end of the decade he was in financial difficulties and had to place properties in trust for his wife, Eleanor. In 1832, Mahorney, still in financial straits, lost his property on Third Street in a foreclosure suit, in spite of this Mahorney continued to reside in Georgetown and deal in real estate until 1858 when he went to Washington to live with a daughter. At his death a year later his children inherited various Georgetown and Washington properties. Active in community affairs, Mahorney held the office of "Messenger and Scavenger" for the Board of Aldermen in Georgetown and also owned stock in the Georgetown Corporation. (Will of George Mahorney).

Alfred Boucher, who owned other property in the neighborhood and who had a grocery business at the corner of Potomac and Bridge (now M) Streets, bought Mahorney's Third Street property in 1834 for \$800. The Bouchers held Lot 105 and part of Lot 104 for nine years, using it as rental property. In 1843 the eastern portion on which 79 Third Street stood was sold to William Herron, while the western part was conveyed to John O'Donoghue (sometimes spelled O'Donnoghue or O'Donohue).

Herron, a contractor, who later in the mid-1850's built his mansion on the nearby northwest corner of Third (now P) and Fayette (now 35th), owned and rented this part of Lot 105 (now Lot 917) until 1851 when John O'Donoghue, living at "Third Street, corner Ligan," added it to his western portion.

John O'Donnoghue, was part of a large family who operated candle and soap factories both in western Georgetown and in Washington City. In 1834 John, together with Peter O'Donoghue, was operating a "Soap and Candle Factory, near Ligan & First Streets, south side." The 1855 City Directory lists him as "soap chandler, 105 second" (now O). Three years later in 1858 he is still listed as a chandler and now living near his earlier business on First (now N Street) near Ligan (now 36th Street). Many other O'Donoghues were also living and doing business at these same addresses.

Although he bought the property in 1859, John O'Brien, laborer, is not listed as living at 79 Third Street until 1865. In 1860 he was boarding at 59 Bridge (now M) Street, and in 1863 and 1864 he was living at 180 High (now Wisconsin Avenue). In 1865, O'Brien moved into 79 Third Street (3522 P Street) and lived there for three years, until his death in 1888. Surviving him, when he died (intestate), until his death in 1888. Surviving him, when he died (intestate), were his widow, Johanna O'Brien and four children--James and John O'Brien, Ellen O'Brien Sullivan and Mary O'Brien Sullivan. (The last O'Briens to be listed in city directories at this address were noted in 1888 when both John O'Brien and John O'Brien, Jr., stonecutter, are listed at 3522 P.

Johanna outlived her husband by twenty years. She continued to live in the P Street house across from the Convent for eight years after John's death. Living with her were her daughter and son-in-law, Mary and John Sullivan; he was listed in city directories as a clerk and later as a bartender. In 1897 Johanna moved in with Ellen O'Brien Sullivan, her other married daughter, nearby on O Street, and rented the P Street house. For over fifty years, until the O'Brien heir sold the little house in 1943, it was rented to persons such as "George Coates, helper" and "Louise Williams, porter," who performed manual and domestic services in the neighborhood. Mary O'Brien Sullivan, John O'Brien's last surviving child, stated: "I collected the rents from it, sometimes they paid me and sometimes they didn't."

When the house was sold to Roxanna Doran in 1943 for \$3500, it was occupied by Florence Winston, "(wid Daniel), maid," who paid a monthly rental of \$20.50. After major repairs it was sold in 1948 to Stanhope Chase, who for twenty years has been using it as rental property. The house has been vacant at intervals, but in recent years has been occupied, chiefly by tenants who in government and industry.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Civil Action Case, Mary Sullivan vs. other heirs of John and Johanna O'Brien. #10,584, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.  
Georgetown, D.C., clippings from newspaper and magazines, compiled by Washingtoniana Division, Public Library, Washington, D.C., 1936 to present 5 volumes.

Interviews with:

Mrs. Agnes Southey Sullivan, 3701 Connecticut Avenue, N.W. (Mrs. Sullivan's husband was the grandson of John O'Brien).

Mr. James Sullivan, 1331 P Street, N.W. (Mr. Sullivan was born in Georgetown in the 1880's and as a boy delivered groceries in the area. He died in February, 1969).

Mrs. Lillian Kengla Harper, 1248 Wisconsin Avenue N.W. (Mrs. Harper is a granddaughter of Margaret O'Donoghue).

Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Ahearn, 3242 Q Street, N.W. (Mr. Ahearn was born in Georgetown in the 1880's, carried papers in the area as a boy, and for the rest of his life operated a newsstand on M Street in Georgetown).

Record Group 351, National Archives, Record of the City of Georgetown (D.C.): Assessment of Real and Personal Property, Microcopy 605, Roll 8, (1813-1818).

Will of George Mahorney, Case OS 4108, Will Book 15, Page 194, March 27, 1859. Probated October 26, 1875. Register of Wills, Washington, D.C.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, D.C., Hatboro, Pennsylvania: R.H. Baist, 1968, Vol. 3, Plan 2.

City Directories:

Georgetown Directory for the year 1830, p. 10.

For 1834 A Full Directory for Washington City, Georgetown and Alexandria, pp. 2,6.

Boyd's Washington and Georgetown Directory, 1863, p. 234; 1864, p. 306; 1865, p. 390.

Boyd's Directory of the District of Columbia, 1888, p. 683, 1890, p. 833; 1896, p. 872.

Boyd's District of Columbia Directory, 1914, p. 1655; 1928, p. 2132; 1942, p. 1672.

Polk's Washington City Directory, 1954, p. 387; 1956, p. 1027; 1960, p. 452; 1964, p. 424.

Georgetown Metropolitan. January 26, 1833, Newspaper Reading Room, Serial Division, Library of Congress.

Prepared By Volunteers for the  
Commission of Fine Arts  
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1969

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: This small clapboard house, though planned like a row house, is actually free-standing. Although it is two stories high (three at the rear), it appears smaller because the street and sidewalk have been raised about three feet.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair; needs painting badly (1969)

### B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 16' by 20' with 16' by 16' ell at rear. Two bays across P Street facade. Two stories high.
2. Foundations: Rubble stone basement walls with some later brick.
3. Wall construction: Wood frame; front has 8" shiplap siding; sides and rear have plain 6" weatherboarding; there are plain, unbeaded corner boards.
4. Chimneys: One about 30" square of brick, located at rear of main block of house.
5. Openings:
  - a. Doors and doorways: Front door has six raised panels, a three-light transom, and a flat, backbanded, eared surround.
  - b. Windows and shutters: There is one window on the first floor, two on the second. All are six-over-six-light double hung wood sash. There is a quirked cyma reverse cap moulding on otherwise flat trim. Shutters are louvered wood. Windows in the rear addition are modern.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: Gable, ridge running eastwest on main block, north-south on rear ell; composition shingles.
- b. Framing: Wood, with very wide sheathing boards (14" - 16").
- c. Cornice: Later wood cornice has four scrolled brackets and fifteen smaller modillions. Gutter is built in behind.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan:

- a. The first floor has one room across the width of the house with a stair along the west wall, to the south of which was added at an early date another room with a stair to the basement along the west wall.
  - b. The second floor has a bedroom above the front room with a modern bathroom in the southwest corner.
  - c. The basement has a kitchen on the north and a dining room to the south with a small powder room and heating equipment area between.
2. Stairways: The stair to the second floor ascends from a one-riser landing in the southwest corner of the original house along the west wall to the second floor. The stair to the basement descends from the northwest corner of the rear addition along the west wall to the dining room. Both stairs are of closed-string construction with modern newels, balusters, and handrails.
3. Flooring: Flooring in general is random width pine; that in the dining room is 12" pine boards; that in the kitchen is resilient tile.
4. Walls and ceiling finish: Plaster, painted or papered. South living room has exposed rafters, stained dark; kitchen has exposed adzed joists above, dining room has exposed sawn heavy joists above. Fireplace wall in north living room is panelled with striated plywood.



5. Doors and doorways: There are ~~sixteen~~ doors, six-raised-panel doors, and louvered doors, all of mid-twentieth century manufacture.
6. Decorative features and trim: One doorway left of the fireplace in the north living room has an early to mid-nineteenth century casing. The south living room fireplace has a very simple mantel shelf with beaded edges supported by two narrow cyma reversa brackets; the dining room mantel is similar. All three fireplaces have been rebuilt with brick surrounds but still have early hearths. The north living room fireplace has a simple architrave (modern) around the new brickwork, although there is a very elaborate cast-iron and brass Empire style grate. Door and window trim throughout is mid-twentieth century.

7. Heating: Forced hot air.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Located on the south side of P Street. Due to the raising of the street level in the past century the house is entered through a 3' - 0" deep area-way across the front. The block is composed of similar sized houses of varying ages and faces the grounds of the Convent of the Visitation.
2. Enclosures: Cross-buck fence of 2 x 4's around areaway at front, various wood fences enclose the rear yard.
3. Walks: Brick and concrete.
4. Landscaping: Small-scale residential planting in the fenced rear yard; none in the paved areaway in the front.

Prepared by The Office of  
Walter G. Peter, Jr., AIA  
Architect  
March 3, 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of a project to record structures in the western part of the Georgetown Historic District in Washington, D.C. The project was conducted by the Commission of Fine Arts with the cooperation of the Historic American Buildings Survey. The resulting documentation was donated to HABS by the Commission and published in 1970 in HABS Selections Number 6, "Georgetown Architecture - Northwest: Northwest Washington, District of Columbia." Research for the project was conducted by volunteers under the supervision of Ms. Nancy Black, staff member of the Commission of Fine Arts. Architectural information was prepared by The Office of Walter G. Peter, Jr., A.I.A. The photographs were taken by J. Alexander. The data was edited and prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by HABS architectural historian Emily J. Harris in 1979.